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Supporters speak out for school paper

Story on gay teens gets D-11's attention

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A high school newspaper article on gay teens prompted more than 100 people to pack a Colorado Springs School District 11 meeting Wednesday night and could lead to a tough new policy on what students can publish.

The article, about the difficulties that homosexual teens face, was published in the Oct. 24 edition of The Lever, the Palmer High School newspaper. The piece was titled "Finding True Love — Gay Teens Search for a Place."

An editorial that supported gay marriage appeared in the same edition.

Two parents called Palmer Principal Jay Engeln to complain that the story was inappropriate for a school paper.

Colorado for Family Values Chairman Will Perkins and D-11 board President S. Kent Olvey also felt it wasn't suitable.

But the gay youths, high school students, parents and community activists who filled the hallways and the aisles at the D-11 administrative offices stood solidly behind it.

The front-page story — and the debate surrounding it — prompted more than an hour of emotional testimony about homosexuality, free speech, the role of education and the rights of all minorities.

Gay teens and adults talked about the pain of hiding their sexuality. Parents with gay children talked about the importance of discussion around the issue of teen homosexuality.

And everyone who spoke endorsed the article, saying it brought a relevant subject to light.

"Censoring this type of subject is wrong," said Wasson High School student Anna Barkley. "Everyone has to learn about (homosexuality) someday and accept it."

What wasn't discussed at press time was the proposed policy change.

The proposal would give school staff members broad control over what students can print in their school newspapers and magazines.

Principals or faculty advisers would have veto power over articles that could be "reasonably perceived to advocate drug, alcohol or tobacco use, irresponsible sex, or conduct otherwise inconsistent with the shared values of a civilized social order. . . ."

They could also head off stories that "may associate the school with any position other than neutrality on matters of political controversy. . . ."

The proposal was written by school lawyers at the request of Burnley after the Lever controversy erupted. The board won't vote on the proposal until later this month.